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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEYLIE
★ FEB 10
December 31, 1931.SANCTUARIES ESTABLISHED UNDER THE MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION ACTHistory

The recent Federal law for the establishment of migratory game-bird refuges, known as the migratory-bird conservation act of February 18, 1929, took effect on July 1 of that year, when the necessary funds became available. This most important legislation was the culmination of years of effort on the part of wild-life conservationists who recognized the need for establishing sanctuaries for ducks, geese, and other migratory game birds throughout the United States. Supplementing as it does the migratory-bird treaty act of 1918, its passage and administration mark further steps in this country's efforts to carry out its international obligations for the protection of the birds that spring and fall migrate between the United States and Canada.

The responsibility of selecting and negotiating for the areas that will contribute so materially to the preservation of wild fowl devolves on the Bureau of Biological Survey, of the United States Department of Agriculture. Shortly after the passage of the act the Secretary of Agriculture authorized the creation in the Biological Survey of a Division of Land Acquisition, which would have immediate supervision of all activities of the bureau in the matter of examining, appraising, and acquiring, by purchase, gift, and lease, and by Executive order, such wild-life refuge lands as might be found biologically suitable for the purpose. It is the function of this division to negotiate with the owners for the purchase of lands and to reach equitable price agreements preliminary to recommendation by the Biological Survey that acquisition be approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. The personnel of this division have had long and varied training and experience in all phases of land-acquisition work, including boundary surveys, land classification, and valuation.

Procedure

Immediately upon the passage of the migratory-bird conservation act, the Biological Survey instituted a nation-wide investigation of sites recommended as suitable for refuge purposes. This was based on information it has accumulated during the last forty-five years, supplemented by data supplied by many citizens who are interested in the successful accomplishment of the objectives set out in the refuge program.

The initial examinations are conducted by the Division of Food Habits Research. This division's function is to determine the suitability of the areas proposed from the standpoint of their wild-fowl food resources. Favorable reports in this regard are followed by investigation by the Division of Land Acquisition to determine the types of land and their extent, the soil cover, and the improvements, and to ascertain the market values of lands, cover, and improvements.

Character and Extent of Units

The units selected for migratory-bird refuges are to be of such character as will best serve the purposes for which the act was passed. Usually they will be more or less extensive areas of lowland, comprising marsh and woodland contiguous to or embracing water areas, or they may be areas that formerly were well suited as feeding, breeding, and resting grounds for migratory birds, but are now useless for the purpose by reason of drainage developments or evaporation, though subject to restoration to their natural conditions.

The plans that have been developed contemplate a nation-wide network of refuges, possibly one or more in every State of the Union, each to contain from 20,000 to 50,000 acres. Such units will permit isolation, offer varieties of attractions to most if not all species of migratory birds, and lend themselves to more nearly ideal administrative arrangements than would smaller areas. By reason of unusual conditions that prevail in certain localities, it may not always be feasible to acquire as much as 20,000 acres in one unit, but smaller refuges will be the exception rather than the rule.

Outstanding Requirements of the Refuge Law

Section 2 of the migratory-bird conservation act creates the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, to consider and pass upon any area of land and water that may be recommended by the Secretary of Agriculture for purchase or rental under the act. The commission consists of the Secretary of Agriculture, as chairman, the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Interior, two members of the United States Senate, and two members of the House of Representatives.

Section 4 requires that the Secretary of Agriculture shall recommend no area for purchase or rental unless he shall have determined that it is necessary for the conservation of migratory game birds.

Section 7 requires that no area shall be acquired for refuges in a State unless that State shall have consented by law to the acquisition by the Federal Government of lands within its bounds. Such consent has thus far been given by all but 8 of the States. These are New Hampshire, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Arkansas, Idaho, Washington, and Utah.

Appropriations Authorized by Act

The appropriations authorized to be made by the migratory-bird conservation act cover a period of ten years, and would aggregate \$7,875,000, as follows:

For 1930	\$ 75,000.
For 1931	200,000.
For 1932	600,000.
For 1933	1,000,000.
For the next six years ..	1,000,000.

The \$75,000 authorized for the fiscal year 1930 was appropriated and used for the examination of areas deemed suitable for refuges; the \$200,000 authorized for 1931 was appropriated and expended for further examinations and the acquisition of lands. For the year 1932 only \$400,000 has been appropriated.

Accomplishments

Wild-fowl food resources have been studied on one or more areas in every State in the Union, the total number of such examinations being 168, and land examinations, soil-cover, soil-productive value, status of ownership, and related economic studies have been made within 115 units, embracing 3,021,158 acres.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission held its first meeting on May 26, 1930, to consider recommendations by the Secretary of Agriculture, and it approved the acquisition of 37,735 acres within two units. On December 18, 1930, another meeting was held when the program presented was approved to authorize acquisition of 73,782 acres in four units. On December 3, 1931, the third meeting of the commission was held, and the program prepared by the Biological Survey was approved, authorizing the acquisition of lands for 10 migratory-game bird refuges, aggregating 43,227 acres in 9 States.

Since the inception of the work on July 1, 1929, the following refuges have been established:

Refuges Established by Executive Order

Benton Lake Migratory Bird Refuge, in Choteau and Cascade Counties, Montana, will contain in its entirety 26,669 acres, of which 12,389 acres are public lands. By Executive order of November 21, 1929, these public lands were set aside as a wild-life refuge and immediately thereafter came under the jurisdiction of the Biological Survey for administration as an inviolate sanctuary. Large numbers of migratory waterfowl seek this site in their nesting seasons and during the semi-annual migration periods.

Salt Plains Migratory Bird Refuge, in Alfalfa County, Oklahoma, contains in the total area designated as suitable for refuge purposes 19,985 acres. Of this area 18,684 acres were found to be public land. By Executive order of March 26, 1930, the public land acreage was withdrawn and made available for the refuge.

Salton Sea Migratory Bird Refuge, in Imperial County, California, is in the extreme southern part of that State, and embraces submerged and marginal lands in the lower extremity of Salton Sea. A remarkable feature of Salton Sea is that the surface of the water is about 230 feet below sea level. At one time there was no water there, but in 1905 the Colorado River broke out of its channel and inundated hundreds of square miles of this large depression. As the southern end of the lake thus formed lends itself admirably to the purposes contemplated under the migratory-bird conservation act, the President, by Executive order of November 25, 1930, set aside 15,733 acres of public lands there for the refuge. This refuge is in the direct line of flight of migratory birds that traverse the Pacific-coast flyways.

Fallon Migratory Bird Refuge, in Churchill County, Nevada, is part of the only extensive marsh area in the western part of that State. Its importance as a bird refuge can not be over-emphasized, and its wild-fowl food resources are equaled by few other areas in the United States. The area is made up of alternate sections of Government-owned lands, of which 17,902 acres were set aside by Executive order of April 22, 1931.

Refuges Acquired or under Purchase or Lease Agreement

Cape Romain Migratory Bird Refuge, in Charleston County, South Carolina, about 35 miles northeast of the city of Charleston, comprises in its total area about 33,000 acres. That part of it above high tide was in private ownership, but title is being acquired under an agreement of purchase. A considerable part of the refuge is between high and low tide, and title to this has never been divested from the State. South Carolina contributed to the establishment of this Atlantic-seaboard refuge by enacting a law granting jurisdiction over the tidal lands to the United States.

St. Marks Migratory Bird Refuge, in Wakulla, Jefferson, and Taylor Counties, Florida, extends for approximately 14 miles along Apalachee Bay. The total area embraced within the exterior limits is 21,076 acres, acquisition of 13,983 acres of which was approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission on December 18, 1930, and of 5,285 acres on December 3, 1931. The remaining lands are subject to negotiations, and recommendation for further acquisitions will be made when the Biological Survey reaches satisfactory price agreements with the owners. This refuge is noted as a wintering ground for Canada geese.

San Luis Lake Migratory Bird Refuge, in Alamosa County, in the south central part of the State of Colorado, an area of 5,500 acres of land and water, has been approved but not yet acquired. It is in an immense region otherwise without areas of land and water as well suited for refuge purposes. The refuge as designated embraces San Luis Lake, containing 904 acres, which is in the southern extremity of the refuge, and Head Lake, containing 202 acres, located near its northern limits. Interspersed within the area and between these lakes are numerous lesser lakes, ponds, and shallow sloughs. By reason of its strategic position in the Great Plains flyway, this refuge will form an exceedingly valuable unit in the nation-wide network of refuges to be developed.

Swanquarter Migratory Bird Refuge, in Hyde County, North Carolina, as now constituted contains 15,378 acres of land, with approximately 20,000 acres of Intermingled water area in Pamlico Sound. This tract is in the direct line of flight of the migratory birds frequenting the East Coast. It is a notable resting and feeding area for wild fowl, including swans.

Crescent Lake Migratory Bird Refuge, in Garden County, Nebraska, containing approximately 39,000 acres is one of the outstanding purchases under the refuge program. This unit is in the west-central part of the State in the famous sandhill region, known to every sportsman as a favorite nesting area for ducks and other forms of migratory birds. This site was selected after more than 200,000 acres of land in Nebraska had been thoroughly investigated by the Biological Survey. The numerous lakes, ponds, and potholes scattered throughout this refuge, and their freedom from alkali and other contamination, mark it as of outstanding value for a bird sanctuary.

Hutton Lake and Bamforth Lake Migratory Bird Refuges.--Refuge opportunities in Wyoming are exceedingly meager. The Biological Survey was gratified, therefore, to obtain commitments for the sale of 1,346 acres at Hutton Lake and 965 acres at Bamforth Lake, Wyoming. The lands at Bamforth Lake comprise only a part of the unit--the total area suitable being 3,318 acres--and negotiations are being conducted looking to the acquisition of the other tracts. Even though the area in these two units is small, they constitute a distinct addition to the system being created under the act.

Long Lake Migratory Bird Refuge, about 40 miles east of Bismarck, in Burleigh and Kidder Counties, North Dakota, now contains about 4,000 acres of marsh and upland, and approximately the same area of water. When all the land within the exterior limits of this refuge have been acquired, it will contain 18,000 acres of land and water. By reason of its location and natural attractions, this is one of the most valuable bird refuge sites in North Dakota.

Duck sickness has been prevalent within this unit in the past, causing the loss of many birds. The Biological Survey is attempting to devise measures whereby this loss can be avoided. Mallards, pintails, shovelers, blue-winged teals, and sandpipers are found in greatest abundance, while widgeons, gadwalls, green-winged teal, American coots, eared grebes, black terns, willets, marble godwits, lesser scaups, yellow-legs, least sandpipers, solitary sandpipers, and avocets are common. Geese also stop here in large numbers during the migration seasons.

Hempstead Migratory Bird Refuge, on Long Island, New York, an area of 2,274 acres of land and water, was approved for lease, as it is considered an important link in the eastern chain of refuges. It is on the Atlantic-coast flight route of migratory birds and near the metropolitan area of New York, within a zone where there are ordinarily great concentrations of hunters and no refuges.

Blackwater Migratory Bird Refuge, on the eastern shore of Maryland about 10 miles from Cambridge, contains approximately 10,000 acres, including marshes where black ducks and blue-winged teal breed in greater numbers than on any other area on the eastern seaboard south of Labrador. Mallards and pintails also concentrate on the marshes during the migration season, and many shorebirds will find sanctuary there. It is considered an outstanding acquisition in the refuge program.

In addition to the area in the Salton Sea Migratory Bird Refuge, California, as established by Executive order in 1931, a description of which is given earlier in this leaflet, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission on December 18, 1930, approved the acquisition of 8,982 acres of privately owned lands intermingled with the public lands. Through this acquisition practically all lands needed to establish an effective migratory-bird refuge have been brought under jurisdiction of the Biological Survey.

In addition to the area in the Fallon Migratory Bird Refuge, Nevada, set aside by Executive order, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission at its meeting on December 3, 1931, approved the purchase of 13,386 acres of privately owned lands, which round out an extensive area of marsh and mud flats.

Summary

Thus, by the end of the year 1931, after 2 1/2 years of work, arrangements were completed for the establishment of ten migratory-bird refuges through purchases or leases authorized by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission and of four others by the reservation of public lands for the purpose by Executive order, with provision for the enlargement of two of these by acquisition of adjacent private lands.

These refuges, established under the program made possible by the migratory-bird conservation act, are additional to the number already under administration by the Biological Survey, earlier set aside, purchased, or deeded for the welfare of the bird life of the country.



